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ABSTRACT

Each of these four papers highlights findings of a National Institute of Education-sponsored project entitled "Citizen Organizations: A Study of Citizen Participation in Educational Decisionmaking." The first paper, "Class, Power, and Networking: Implications of Existing Network Patterns Among Groups," discusses the effect of inter-organizational exchanges of information and resources on organizational effectiveness. Study findings indicated that middle-class groups had the most extensive networks, but it remained unclear whether networks were a cause or a result of organizational influence. The second paper, "Implications of the Research for Citizen Participation," presents evidence to support the finding that community organizations are preoccupied with self-survival and therefore other priorities including representation of community interests in school policy are secondary to that effort. Implications for organizations and government are discussed. "School Boards, Public Participation and Public Control of Public Schools," the third paper, discusses patterns of school governance and the effect of school board accessibility on the behavior of citizen participation groups. The last paper, "School Administrators and Citizen Groups," presents evidence to suggest that although legally mandated citizen participation groups are the most available vehicle for involvement in school policy, they cannot replace voluntary organizations and might be more effective if they established links with voluntary groups. (MK)

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Four Short Papers Highlighting Aspects of a Study of Citizens Organizations: Citizen Participation in Educational Decisionmaking

Institute for Responsive Education

Boston, Massachusetts

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1 Class, Power, and Networking: Implications of Existing Network Patterns Among Groups

BACKGROUND: NETWORKING AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

The capstone of the National Institute of Education-funded project entitled, "Citizen Organizations: A Study of Citizen Participation in Educational Decisionmaking," was an 18-month comparative study of community organizations' effectiveness in three cities: Atlanta, Boston, Los Angeles. The sample of 16 organizations for this study included groups that were mandated and voluntary, upper and lower income, citywide and neighborhood based.

The study found that, first, organizations in the sample clustered around three, on the whole, mutually exclusive organizational strategy-orientations: (i) advocacy, i.e. political action; (ii) service delivery; and (iii) advisory. Second, effectiveness was associated with the pursuit of an advocacy strategy. Effectiveness was defined as an organization's ability to represent constituency interests in influencing school policies and measured by reputation for influence as revealed in decisionmaker interviews. Third, while the advocacy orientation was more likely to promote influence, such an orientation was almost exclusive to middle-class, voluntary organizations. Such organizations, as a result of their class status, were characterized by internal dependency, relying on membership resources for organizational maintenance. Lower income organizations, on the other hand, showed external dependency. Since the two most pervasive forms in lower-income communities are mandated and funded service organizations, their tendency is toward external dependence. The resulting inability to take independent action precludes advocacy strategies.

Finally, networking behavior (networking defined as inter-organizational contacts initiating exchanges of information and/or resources) reflected the same class-determined, general patterns of organizational effectiveness. Middle-class, voluntary organizations had the most extensive networks.

PATTERNS OF NETWORKING: FIELD REPORT

The indicator for networking was contacts with other organizations as reported by organization leaders. "Levels of networking," i.e. indicators of the degree of networking, are a function of two measures: (i) Network size - indicated by the number of reported contacts with other organizations. (Each contact counted as one irregardless of repetition.) This yields the number of other groups in a given organization's network. (ii) Network diversity - indicated by the range of different groups within a given organization's network.

Does networking promote organizational effectiveness?

The scope and method of this study did not allow for any causal inferences about networking and effectiveness. However, it is interesting to note that it was not the size, but rather the diversity of networks that was associated with a higher degree of effectiveness. While the difference in network size between advocacy and service organizations was minimal, advocacy organizations were alone in reporting contacts with teachers' unions, established civic interest groups, universities and the media. Also, while service organizations had the most contacts with educational administrators, municipal officials, and economic elites, this did not translate into policy influence.

Does networking promote cross-class and cross-racial alliances?

There was little evidence of cross-class or cross-racial contacting among the sample organizations. On the other hand, racial and ethnic identity provided the basis for extensive intra-racial networking. First, there was little evidence of networking among groups pursuing different strategies and issues. The exception was among Hispanic organizations in Los Angeles. Second, most

groups had little contact with national organizations. A Los Angeles Jewish women's organization did report contacts with both national feminist and Jewish women's organizations. Third, even fewer groups networked with state officials or political party leaders. However, some black groups in Boston and Hispanic organizations in Los Angeles networked with their respective black and Hispanic state legislative caucuses.

There were only two exceptions to the general lack of cross-class networking. In Boston, a middle-class service organization reported contacts with a low-income organization. In Atlanta, there were exchanges of information between a black, low-income organization and a black, middle-class organization. In both cases, networking was externally initiated. In Boston, the service group was explicitly funded to service low-income organizations. Cross-class networking in Atlanta was precipitated by both organizations' joint participation in the IRE study.

IMPLICATIONS: CLASS, POWER AND NETWORKING

The limited amount of "vertical," cross-class and cross-racial networking and the close association between levels of networking, organizational effectiveness, and economic class raise questions about the potential of networking as a way of empowering the poor and minorities. Indirectly, such negative findings vindicate two key assumptions of networking theory.

The first is that, excluding occupational networks, inter-organizational networks follow social, interpersonal networks. Hence, it is not surprising that: (i) middle-class organizations show the most extensive networks, including contacts with "elite" institutions such as civic groups, universities, media; (ii) there was little cross-class networking among the organizations; and (iii) that common racial-ethnic identity accounts for those exceptional cases where networking does cross class and interest-issue areas.

The second is that "exchanges" are central to networking. Noting that "...normally, the idea of an exchange...assumes some form of equal value," the Final Research Report, on page 124, concludes that:

> Our findings suggest that networks require an exchange of power; since lower income groups have no power to exchange, middle income groups do not network with them. The one resource lower income organizations potentially have is numbers. However, the movement away from advocacy might well undermine the cohesion and projection of numbers as a resource, therefore further decreasing the ability of lower income organizations to offer something in a networking exchange.

The "political market-place" of inter-organizational networking, interest-group representation, bargaining, and log-rolling is akin to the economic market-place; in each case one needs a stock of resources to enter the game. For resource-poor community organizations which wish to pursue networking as an empowerment strategy, the first step is to cultivate their one most available resource: numbers of people. Constituency building is the necessary precondition for successful inter-organizational networking. For policy-makers who seek to promote networking as a way to integrate organizations representing the poor into existing patterns of interest group influence, the task is to, first, increase such organizations' "stock in trade." This requires mandating and funding policies which provide low-income organizations with "commodities" valued by the established interest groups with whom networking can then become possible.

The result of this study indicates that networking may very well be more of an effect than a cause of organizational influence. While this study has intimated causes for this, further study must be done on networking and be directed specifically to these questions: What kind of inter-organizational networking increases organization capacity? What kind of networking increases organizational influence? What are the necessary preconditions for both functions of networking to occur?

For more information on this study contact: IRE, 704 Commonwealth Ave., Boston, Massachusetts 02215 (617) 353-3309.

Prepared as part of *Citizen Organizations: A Study of Citizen Participation in Educational Decisonmaking* by the Institute for Responsive Education for the Program on Educational Organizations and Local Communities of the National Institute of Education. Field study was conducted by Dr. Marilyn Gittell and her associates at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Its findings are reported in Marilyn Gittell, et al, *Citizen Organizations: Citizen Participation in Educational Decisionmaking*, 1979. That report is available from ERIC.

2 Implications of the Research for Citizen Participation

Community organizations are necessarily preoccupied with self-survival. All other priorities, including representation of community interests in school policy, are secondary to that effort.

This is the central conclusion of a recently completed National Institute of Education-funded study entitled, "Citizens Organizations: Citizen Participation in Educational Decisionmaking." The capstone of the study was an 18-month comparative study of community organizations' effectiveness in three cities: Atlanta, Boston, Los Angeles. The sample of 16 organizations for this study included groups that were mandated and voluntary, upper and lower income, citywide and neighborhood based.

EFFECT OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON PATTERNS OF PARTICIPATION

It is difficult to sustain local organizations and mobilize citizen interest if the goal is to build a highly structured organization. This is even more difficult in low-income areas where people are struggling to survive. Government funding of community organizations has, therefore, become a mainstay of support. Federal and State governments either mandate new community organizations or fund existing organizations as service delivers. Although it makes some difference which of these roles they play, both are a direct influence on the strategies, options and potential organization characteristics of community organizations. For example, many community organizations have moved into youth training, employment and community development programs because government support is available. These organizations rationalize this by saying, "It allows us to do everything else we want to do." Too often, however, organization priorities get dismantled because major energies are spent on funded projects. In this case funded service may conflict with advocacy roles. How can community organizations which are funded for rehab housing projects and are dependent on local bank loans attack red-lining problems by these same banks? Can a Parent Advisory Council appointed by a principal effectively challenge school programs?

An extreme view would characterize government's role, particularly its creation of mandated organizations, as undermining self-initiated grassroots organizations, and limiting the advocacy role of community organizations. Our study would suggest this. Even though well intended, Federal and State mandated programs place a heavy burden on the time and energies of local participants and discourage self-initiated efforts. Federal support of certain kinds of service delivery organizations also influence the direction and character of these groups.

The "neighborhood movement" is an overt outcome of Federal policies which fund service delivery in community development within a limited area. HUD community development funding has provided a major incentive and direction for the "movement." These efforts are hard to criticize since they serve community people in their everyday living. These organizations, however, often have ignored larger policy issues and abandoned the goal of empowerment.

GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Our findings explain the shift from advocacy strategies to service and advisory roles among these organizations, in terms of their dependence on external funding. Leadership is static and membership limited. Much time is spent on maintenance functions and there is little effort expended on important school policy issues. Advocacy continues to be a primary strategy for middle income organizations which are not externally dependent. These middle income organizations have rotating leadership, more internal democracy and engage in a greater amount of networking activity. Mandated organizations are the narrowest in their activities, almost totally dependent on their creators. Their networks are the most limited and their roles most proscribed. These organizations make little effort to expand participation to other community sectors.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Empowerment is the long range goal of low-income community organizations. Strategies should be measured against this goal. Advocacy and service can be

compatible functions, but they must be thoughtfully developed. For example:

1. External dependency should be minimized to encourage independence of action and continuation of advocacy roles for low-income organizations. Every effort should be made to develop sources of internal support. When external support is used, it should be from multiple sources.

2. Highly structured, long term organizations may not be the best strategy for low-income community organizations. Ad hoc organizations may be more appropriate ways of addressing policy issues. The major asset of low-income organizations is numbers of people. Only by collective action on policy issues can numbers be used to build strength and power.

3. Networking with other groups with similar interests around common issues is essential. Organizations should also use access to other resources in the community (e.g., the universities, media, decisionmakers) to promote their interests. School organizations should be working with organizations which have ignored school issues.

4. It may be that single-issue school oriented groups are no longer a viable mechanism for participation in educational policy development and multi-functional community development groups are the best vehicle for such participation.

5. The development and training of community leaders is an essential function. It is best served by internal democracy and expansion of policy roles on the part of low-income organizations.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICYMAKING

Government policies need to point in two directions: 1) making schools more responsive (i.e., providing access for low-income organizations to decisionmakers); and 2) garnering support for viable forms of citizen participation.

Policies to increase schools' responsiveness include:

- Sunshine laws and freedom of information acts.
- Political decentralization of school systems which offers the most significant opportunity for reducing the cost of participation to community organizations.
- The provision of Federal and State incentives to school districts to decentralize their decisionmaking and encourage community participation.

Policies supporting community organizations should:

- Wherever possible, support self-initiated community organizations rather than mandating new organizations.
- Not only recognize self-initiated organizations as representatives of community interest, but also provide technical assistance--government funded resources centers where local organizations can gain access to typing, ditto, photocopying, grant proposal writing, graphics, and public relations materials.
- Provide a formula for direct funding of self-initiated low-income community organizations for general support. Such a formula could use demonstrated membership support as a basis for increased or continued funding.

The development of policy programs to pursue these goals should be on the agenda of community organizations and government officials if they are sincere in their desire to encourage the participation of low-income groups in the democratic process.

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3 School Boards, Public Participation and Public Control of Public Schools

The United States has a tradition of local control in education. School boards are the primary institution for that local control. The existence of lay elected school boards also embodies another feature of our democratic tradition: policy-making by the lay citizenry; policy administration by professionals appointed by the school boards.

Whether school boards can continue to play this historic role as the agents of public control of public schools was one of the questions raised in the Institute for Responsive Education's recently completed, NIE-funded study, "Citizens Organizations: A Study of Citizen Participation in Educational Decisionmaking." The 33-month study included: a survey of research on citizen participation and school governance; over 300 interviews with educators, public officials and citizen organization leaders in a dozen large cities concerning current trends in citizen participation in education; and, an 18-month comparative study of the effectiveness of a sample of 16 citizen organizations in Atlanta, Boston, and Los Angeles.

IDENTIFYING EMERGING PATTERNS OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

The study confirmed the general impression that the 1970's have been a transitional decade. The type of community organization spawned during the 1960's period of protest and War on Poverty remains. However, many organizations have shifted from advocacy to service-delivery activities. This is due, in part, to government funding policies towards community organizations in poverty neighborhoods. Also, there has been growth of community development organizations, most of which are concerned with economic issues --housing, jobs--not school issues.

These two changes--the evolution from advocacy to service activities and the increasing priority of community development functions--have resulted in a new type of organization representing the poor. Many of these maintain a low-profile on school issues. Those that are active in school issues, however, report little contact with their local school boards. Many organization leaders feel that "the action" is elsewhere--at the State and Federal levels, or in the superintendents' offices.

Part of the action coming from Federal and State levels has been the proliferation of mandated parent citizens' advisory committees. In fact, for many low-income parents, these institutions have been the primary vehicle for involvement in schools, rather than more traditional organizations such as PTA's or single issue school improvement associations. The field study, which included a sample of mandated groups, showed that there was little contact between the advisory committees and voluntary community organizations. Also, there was little communication between mandated groups and local school boards.

IDENTIFYING ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Defining effectiveness as organizational ability to represent its constituency interests in influencing school policy, the comparative field study found that upper-middle-class voluntary organizations, pursuing a conscious interest-group strategy, were more influential. Such a strategy was unavailable to lower-income organizations which had been deflected from representing constituent interests to delivering services to clients. In other aspects, Federal policies mandating separate advisory committees for separate categorical programs further fragment the constituency base for organized public participation in general policy issues. In drawing such conclusions, the field study not only reviewed organizational characteristics but also environmental factors (i.e., patterns of school governance) in the three cities.

SCHOOL BOARD BEHAVIOR AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

In reviewing patterns of school governance, the study sought to determine whether different levels of school board accessibility and responsiveness had had any effect on organizational behavior. The study found that such factors as modes of selection and demographic composition made little difference. What did make some difference, however, was the manner in which a board handled its business--its "operating style." In comparing aggregate levels of citizen organization activity across the cities, the study

found higher levels in Los Angeles than in Boston or Atlanta. Part of the reason may have been Los Angeles' "consultative" operating style. Similar to most boards, Los Angeles set time aside for community presentations, and maintained a series of standing committees to deal with specific issues. Citizen organization leaders reported that contacting and appearing before these committees provided them with access. Moreover, for special topics and problems, the district had a practice of creating ad-hoc subcommittees and task forces which incorporated citizen members representing constituency groups. However, this contact and access did not translate into influence. The study found little correlation between a board's operating style and organizational effectiveness. Moreover, increased contact did not necessarily mean better public relations. The study showed that Los Angeles organizations had the lowest levels of confidence in their school system and its leadership.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Continued isolation between boards and the public may, however, be even more disadvantageous. Public opinion polls, commissioned by the National School Boards Association, showed low levels of public knowledge about and confidence in local school boards (Davies, Don, et al. Patterns of Citizen Participation in Educational Decision-making, Vol. I. Boston: Institute for Responsive Education, 1978). However, the fact that both knowledge and confidence levels increased in the smaller school districts suggests that "familiarity does not always breed contempt." Indirectly, this evidence also suggests that the increased numbers of mandated school councils may present boards with an opportunity to increase their contact with the community. Such councils and boards are merely different species of the same genus. Both are, in a sense, "externally mandated" citizens' bodies. While boards, unlike advisory councils, have policymaking powers, these are delegated powers. Education is a state function: local control via local school boards is traditional, not constitutional. Boards and advisory councils, then, can be viewed as part of the same structure of public-lay control over local schools.

A closer integration with school councils reporting directly (or through a federated structure of subdistrict and district-level councils) to boards could, perhaps, increase the boards' decisionmaking capacity. The opinion polls noted earlier also showed that 30% of the American public mistakenly thought that school administrators, not boards, made policy. The most extensive study of school boards conducted by L. Harmon Zeigler and his colleagues (Governing American Schools. North Scituate, Mass.: Duxbury Press, 1974) suggests that this perception may, in fact, be correct. It found that in many cases boards act as rubber stamps to policy proposals originating from superintendents. Such behavior, that study suggests, is the only rational response, given the boards' lack of staff-capacity and independent information sources.

Our study suggests that a working relationship between boards and a system of school-based advisory committees might provide boards with independent sources of information. But, advisory councils do not, and cannot by their nature, represent the full spectrum of community interests. Representing that spectrum of interests requires the active involvement of voluntary, neighborhood and citywide citizens' interests groups. This can be accomplished by local adaptations of the Los Angeles board's "consultative style" where representatives of constituency organizations join board members on ad-hoc, informal problem-solving committees.

The most important implication of this study is that if boards are to maintain and strengthen their role as public overseers of public schools, they need to take steps to promote more public involvement in board decisionmaking. Such steps should include both mandated and voluntary citizen groups.

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4 School Administrators and Citizen Groups

Management of public schools, though never easy, is becoming even more complex. A great deal of this complexity stems from the public nature of public schools. Schools are affected from above by Federal and state mandates which require not only new programs but, via citizen involvement provisions, new adjustments in patterns of school decisionmaking. From below, schools are affected by changing patterns of public opinion and shifts in the manner that public opinion is organized and represented.

The combined effect of both influences was a major center of attention of a recently completed National Institute of Education-funded study entitled, "Citizens Organizations: Citizen Participation in Educational Decisionmaking." That 33-month study included: (i) a review and analysis of the research on citizen participation and school governance; (ii) a 12-city survey, including over 300 on-site interviews with educators and citizen organization leaders; and (iii) an 18-month comparative field-study on a sample of 16 community organizations in three cities: Atlanta, Boston, Los Angeles. The focus of that field study was on what factors determined and contributed to community organizations' effectiveness. Effectiveness was defined as an organization's ability to represent constituency interests in influencing school policy. It was measured by reputation for influence as revealed in decisionmaker interviews. The sample included organizations that were both mandated and voluntary, middle and lower-income, and citywide and neighborhood based.

INFLUENCE FROM BELOW: SHIFTING PATTERNS OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN THE 1970'S

There are three trends which have implications for school-community problem solving in the 1980's confirming the general impression that the 1970's were a decade of transition.

First, there was a decline in influence, especially in urban areas and among minority and low-income populations, of traditional parent organizations such as the PTA and single-purpose education interest groups. The "participation explosion," spawned, in part, by the Poverty Program, has become fragmented. Although community organizations still continue to exist, most adopt a low profile. Many of these organizations focus primarily on economic issues (i.e., housing and jobs) which they do not attempt to correlate with school issues.

Second, fragmentation among organizations in lower-income communities has been accompanied by a shift in organizational function: from "movement" (in either political or social terms, or both) to "service delivery." Such a shift, a classic example of goal displacement, resulted from low-income organizations' dependence on outside resources, typically government funds, to exist. The result, however, was that such organizations service clients rather than represent constituencies.

Finally, for many low-income and minority parents, the most available vehicle for involvement has become the mandated advisory committee. This originates from the increasing proliferation of Federal and, lately, state, citizen participation mandates. For example, there are now ten Federal education programs which require, in one way or another, an advisory committee to ensure "client-target group population" representation. The compensatory nature of many of these programs and their targeting at low-income and minorities, accounts for the prevalence of these mandated forms of participation in low-income communities.

INFLUENCE FROM ABOVE: THE EXPERIENCE OF MANDATED GROUPS

Evidence collected from the 16-organization study does suggest, however, that such mandated groups do not and cannot, by their very nature, serve as the functional equivalent of community interest groups. Mandated groups show the least interest in policy issues. Not surprisingly, they were also reputed to be least influential in policy matters and policy decisionmaking. Moreover, many of these groups had little sense of constituency. There were few contacts between mandated advisory committees and voluntary citizen organizations in the same school attendance area.

This is not surprising. By definition, mandated groups operate within the goals of the mandating agency; their membership and sense of constituency is predetermined by the program to which they are appended. However, the impact of mandates on voluntary forms of participation is of more significance. Previous research has suggested that mandates not only fragment the constituency base for citizen participation by "draining the pool" of participants but also act to "buffer" school decisionmaking from external citizen influence (Steinberg, 1977).

This "buffering" phenomenon was evidenced in the field study. In those school systems where mandated groups were present, administrators restricted their public outreach efforts primarily to contacts with such groups. This behavior was no doubt due to the not unreasonable assumption that these mandated groups, in fact, represented the community. But, given the lack of contact between mandated and voluntary organizations, the result was greater isolation between the school and its community.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICYMAKING

A significant part of the difficulties experienced by mandated councils, especially their lack of documented impact on school programs and their lack of links with community groups, can be traced to an inherent deficiency in clarity of their purpose. Most mandates, either because of legislative compromise and/or well intentioned efforts to allow for local flexibility, are vague about the functions of the mandated group. In many cases, the mandated function is solely to give "advice" without any specifics concerning the scope or authority of such advice (Davies, et al., 1978: 1-23).

The debilitating consequences of this lack of clear purpose can be seen in light of IRE's review of the research and evaluation literature on citizen organizations in education and in other policy areas (Huguenin, et al., 1979). That review identified two factors commonly associated with those cases in which mandated groups were effective in influencing school policies. These two factors were: (i) clarity of goals, and (ii) links with external voluntary groups. Policies for mandates do not typically address such factors. Instead, the focus is on variables which, the research suggests do not make any difference for effectiveness: size and whether the council was elected or appointed. Changes in Federal and state policy are needed to increase the likelihood that mandated groups can increase their effectiveness.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ADMINISTRATION

The evidence from this study suggests, however, that even in the absence of needed policy reforms, administrators can take action to clarify councils' goals and increase councils' contacts with voluntary organizations. Clarity of goals can be the result of a negotiated settlement concerning spheres of activity that exist between councils and school staff.

Links with outside groups can be encouraged by overlapping membership: recruitment and selection practices which provide for community group representation, with peer group selection on the part of the constituencies represented, on councils.

In summation, our evidence suggests that, first, mandated groups cannot take the place of voluntary citizens organizations, and, second, the establishment of links with such organizations may very well be the necessary pre-condition so that mandated groups can be effective vehicles for representing community interests.

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